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ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

FACSIMILE (202) 225-3974
MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
TTY (202) 225-6852

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INDEPENDENT

May 24, 2001

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

To perform a growing number of challenging missions, the men and women of our armed forces must train as they fight. More than anything else, military readiness depends on realistic training. Sending military units into unfamiliar terrain increases mission risks. Combining air, sea and ground forces for the first time in battle invites disaster.

But the availability of realistic training areas is eroding. Defense Department training ranges here and overseas are under siege from a number of forces. From Vieques, Puerto Rico, to San Clemente Island, California, and from Norfolk, Virginia, to Camp Pendleton, California, combat training is being increasingly hemmed in by commercial development, environmental regulations, airspace restrictions and conflicts over use of the radio frequency spectrum.

Urban development has marched to the front gates of once-remote military training installations. Noise restrictions that are often demanded by a base's new neighbors limit the use of artillery ranges and force important low-altitude aviation maneuvers to unrealistically high altitudes.

As development consumes open space around training ranges, compliance with state and federal environmental regulations becomes more complex and more costly. Some Defense Department land has become a haven for endangered species, a habitat of last resort. The burden of protecting wildlife and habitat may be overwhelming the primary training mission at many bases. As the amount of land the Defense Department sets aside for protected species like the fairy shrimp, the gnat-catcher and the checker-spot butterfly expands, training lanes become artificially narrow, drills become predictable and repetitive, and readiness declines.

Fast-growing demand for commercial air travel means less safe airspace for military pilots in already crowded skies. The explosion of wireless technologies threatens to push military equipment off prime radio frequencies just as we're spending billions to link our forces on the digital battlefield.

These problems are affecting the ability of our forces to fight, and this Administration needs to tackle this problem before it gets out of control. For the most part, the Defense Department's answer to encroachment challenges has been to work around the immediate problems while attempting to minimize the impact on the quality and quantity of training. But the cumulative impact of this stop-gap approach is not being addressed. The Clinton Administration studied these issues, but made no real proposals for long-term solutions. These problems are affecting the ability of our forces to fight, and this Administration needs to tackle this problem before it gets out of control.

On May 9, 2001, after eight months of field investigation, the Committee on Government Reform conducted a hearing entitled "Challenges to National Security: Constraints on Military Training." Senior military operational commanders of the Army, the Navy, the Marines and the Air Force described with passionate directness the unique encroachment challenges facing each service in specific detail. The Members of this Committee were shocked at the operational difficulties facing those whose job it is to make the military ready. Enclosed please find a tape of this hearing and the testimony of the commanders. We are sure that you will find it as compelling as we did.

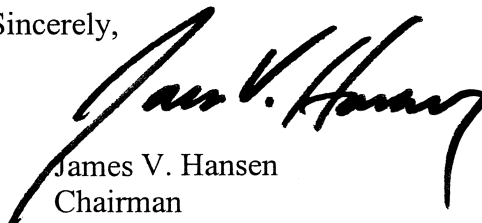
This Committee will continue to focus on the challenges facing military readiness and national security. In our view, the issue is not readiness versus the environment, or readiness versus development, or readiness versus commercial aviation. We should not have to choose. The central question before us is how all these important national interests can be advanced in a balanced cooperative way.

We urge you to initiate government reforms that address this interconnected set of problems so that bipartisan solutions can be developed before the situation deteriorates further. When we call upon our military -- active duty, National Guard and Reserves -- to go into harm's way, we should do so only with complete confidence that they are thoroughly trained and ready. They have a right to expect that training, and we as a nation have an obligation to provide it. We look forward to working with you and your Administration in addressing this important national security issue.

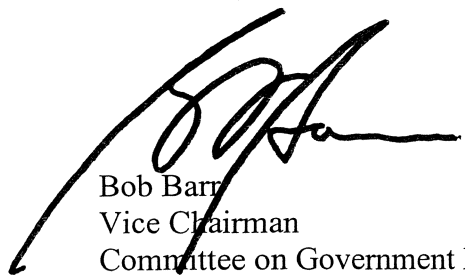


Dan Burton
Chairman
Committee on Government Reform

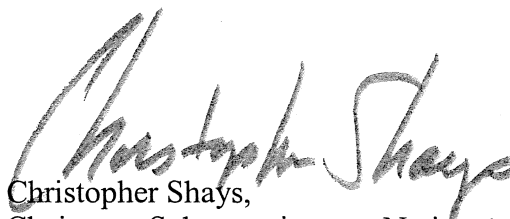
Sincerely,



James V. Hansen
Chairman
Committee on Resources



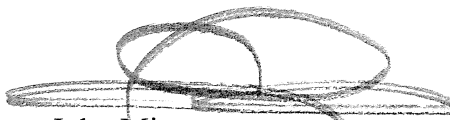
Bob Barr
Vice Chairman
Committee on Government Reform



Christopher Shays,
Chairman, Subcommittee on National
Security, Veterans Affairs and
International Relations



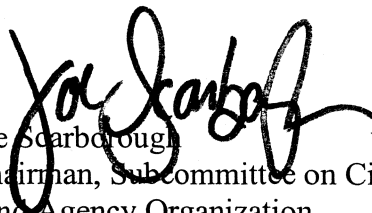
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Steve LaTourette
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Economic Development, Public
Buildings and Emergency Management



Tom Davis
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Technology and Procurement Policy



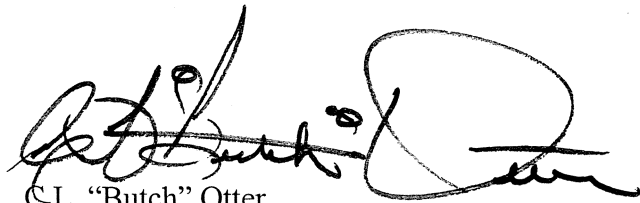
Doug Ose
Chairman, Subcommittee on Energy
Policy, Natural Resources and Regulatory
Affairs



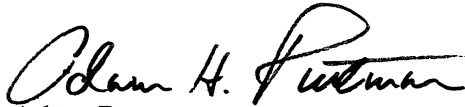
Ron Lewis
Member of Congress



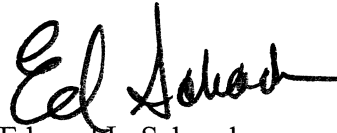
JoAnn Davis
Member of Congress



C.L. "Butch" Otter
Member of Congress



Adam Putnam
Vice Chairman, Subcommittee on
National Security, Veterans Affairs
and International Relations



Edward L. Schrock
Member of Congress